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ABSTRACT

Comprehensiveness, local control, and public funding combine to create public secondary schools that serve the educational needs of all students and are open to influence from people outside the school structure. From these sectors come demands for accountability; community influence; and a heavy commitment of resources to maintaining good attendance, discipline, and public relations, which are the responsibility of the school administration. Secondary school curriculum consists of a broad range of diverse courses. This diversity is the result of perceived student needs and, in particular, the public schools' vulnerability to pressure from advocacy groups who, by their special demands, shape and increase curriculum offerings. Responsibility for curriculum falls to the teachers, who must instruct and relate to students, and not burden the administration with disciplinary problems. Fragmented, diverse, open, and fluid curriculum responds to the needs and demands of students with widely divergent abilities, attitudes toward education, and career plans. The critical factor which differentiates a "good" school from one not so good is the orientation of the majority of the students in the school toward superior academic education. (JD)

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SECONDARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

Following the outline of Charter Provision One of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the paper will characterize and discuss secondary public schools in America. Certain explicit questions will be addressed: What are secondary schools like for students? What are the adjustments one has to make upon entering them? What may one reasonably expect to learn in them? What is the dominant view of learning held by the staff members and how do they go about instructing students? How do the limits and the possibilities of the experience change from the time one enters high school at 13 or 14 to the time one leaves at 17 or 18.

THE STRUCTURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

In the United States, public schools have followed the comprehensive model which according to Conant has three main objectives: "First to provide a general education for all future citizens, second to provide good elective programs for those who wish to use their acquired skills immediately on graduation; third to provide satisfactory programs for those whose vocations depend on their subsequent education in a college or university." Whether a comprehensive secondary school which attempts to fulfill all three functions under the same roof, or on the same site, and also encourages its students to intermingle in

a variety of elective courses and activities can be successful is really not an answerable question. There is such great diversity among secondary schools that the question would almost have to be addressed school by school. And, there is even the question of whether the unit of analysis should be the "school" per se, or whether one should be using individual students or particular groups, e.g., minority students as the referent. But while schools and referent groups differ, the comprehensive model, as it is understood does have a certain basic structure, and all comprehensive schools share some distinct elements. The paper will begin with a discussion of those common structural elements, enter into a further discussion of secondary school curriculum and finally address the stated questions.

The structure of an organization is what confronts one when he enters either as a staff member or a client. Regardless of his predilections, ambitions or talents, each person in an organization is faced with a set of constraints and while each may make a different accommodation each has to accommodate the same set. The set of constraints defines the possibilities of success and of failure. It defines the rewards one may strive for and the sanctions one may incur. It combines the realities of the place in terms of time, space, and resources with the set of understandings that the participants share about those realities. There is a certain logic within an

organization which binds events and behavior into an abstracted coherence, and it is that logic that is used to judge certain things as worthwhile and to dismiss others as meaningless. This structure is what insiders have to recognize to succeed and what outsiders have to comprehend to understand the actions of insiders.

There are a few elements that underlie the organization of comprehensive schools, and the combination of these has some secondary effects which are also part of the structure. The first element is that the schools are large and diverse, e.g., comprehensive. The second is that they are publically funded, from local property and state taxes, and are generally funded on a per-pupil basis. Per pupil funding is the basis for the allocation of state monies, is frequently written into teachers' contracts and has wide popular acceptance. From these elements follows the notion of "accountability" to a paying public that the schools are supposed to serve. There are a number of secondary characteristics that flow from these elements. The first is that these comprehensive schools, since they are funded on a per pupil basis and accountable to the public, are obligated to attract and retain students regardless of abilities, ambitions or inclinations. This was not always the case. As late as 1960 in a number of states, money was allocated to schools on the basis of students residing in the area, not students attending school. But when the

allocation process was changed to the present system, schools were more obligated to further diversify their programs to interest a wider variety of students. A second important element in the structure is the belief that this "paying public" has the right to influence curriculum. This is the basis of the endless attempts on the part of one or another group to have more or fewer attention and resources given to reading, music, athletics, special education, extended bus service, free lunch, the firing of one or another administrator, the recalling of one or another board member, or perhaps an emphasis on creationism, the "basics," accountability, frugality, or equity. Even in the poorer districts where state support far exceeds local funding, there is still the attitude that the local citizenry should exert control over the curriculum.

There is an additional element underlying all of the above. That is, a firm belief that the acquisition of positive knowledge is or can be made interesting and appealing to everyone. By positive knowledge, I mean that which is generally accepted as having an empirical or traditional base, which is socially useful and which lends itself to expression in verbalized and abstracted forms. It included computer science, English literature, welding and physical education. This is a very important assumption because it justifies the continued diversifying of the curriculum in order to appeal to the diverse students.

In sum, the comprehensiveness, local control and public funding, combine to support a structure in which it is deemed proper that the school should serve the educational needs of all the students and should allow a considerable measure of influence from people outside the school. From these flow additional characteristics.

Since they are obligated to serve a large number of very diverse students in the same place, a tremendous effort is needed to (1) insure attendance by those students who may not be particularly interested in school and (2) maintain order among this large and diverse set. The prevailing attitude among school administrators is that attendance is a more serious problem than are order and discipline. They feel that if they can attract the students into school and into class, then order will follow; hence in all secondary schools a tremendous effort is directed reducing absenteeism which in some urban schools can run as high as 30% on a given day. While in many schools, that figure may be as low as three or four percent, low figures are maintained only by constant effort on the part of administrators. The impetus to retain students is strengthened by the funding processes and the belief about positive knowledge. If students leave, the school failed that student and the school looses funding. Concerning this order and discipline, it is generally agreed upon by administrators and people who study schools, that they are much more

orderly than commonly perceived. But it is also agreed upon that order and discipline are maintained at a very high cost with the greatest part of the available administrative and supervisory help allocated to those areas.

There is an additional effect on administrators. Because of the school's publicness, administrators are obligated to spend a considerable amount of their time maintaining good relations with various segments of the community. While attendance and discipline may devour more time and energy on the urban than in rural or suburban areas, maintaining good relations with the community is particularly time consuming in the latter where the administrators are allowed almost no anonimity. Faced with communities that are both wary and demanding of the school, the high school principals in small communities are under constant surveillance by the community and they lead lives that are almost totally public. They are the most visible people in the areas, called on for myriad community functions, asked to help with the students private lives in and out of school, and of course, expected to maintain the highest standards of decency and discretion. This is not regarded as a "problem," rather it is a fact of life when one is in charge of a publically funded institution designed to serve the "needs" of all the citizens and open to influence by one or another of those citizens. But it does have a serious effect. Just as does attendance and discipline, it takes up a great amount of administrative and supervisory time. In fact, matters of attendance, discipline

and public relations take up the greatest part of the supervisory and administrative resources in public secondary schools.

In sum, while secondary schools may be quite different from one another, endemic to all are some common elements, e.g. large size, diversity, public and per pupil funding. From these come some additional elements, such as diversity, accountability, public influence and a heavy commitment of resources to maintaining good attendance, discipline and public relations.

THE CURRICULUM

The logic of the paper is that an organization has a structure which is a combination of environmental and human constraints, and that the events and behaviors which occur within the organization are shaped by that structure. Having laid out the basic structure of secondary schools, we can address the curriculum. It is generally agreed upon that secondary school curriculum consist of tremendously broad range of diverse and discrete courses. As Abramowitz

et al in their NIE/NASSP study of 2000 secondary schools concluded:

> High schools offer a smorgasbord of programs, practices, options and services. Students can choose from an array of courses on the basis of their personal needs and career goals. If high schools fit the rigid inflexible patterns suggested by some critics they do so only in scheduling classes and/or evaluating student performance.

For illustration of this diversity consider some particular secondary schools, the first with a five period day, five day week. (This five-by-five schedule was the response of many urban secondary schools to the problems of racial discord. Such a schedule allows study halls, no cafeteria, no activity or free periods in the 60's and 70's. It was during those periods that racial discord was at its worse, so those times were eliminated.) In that school each student is required to take eight semesters of English, four of history, two each of science and mathmatics, two of physical education, and one of government.

Within the departments are not only a large number of courses and given the number of electives in any area, and the division into levels of difficulty, there are in this school 30 separate courses available in English. One may choose from among Shakespeare, Mythology, or Tradition and Revolt in Literature, Music as Expression, Speech, Yearbook, Newspaper, Drama, Mankind's Voice Today, Investigative Paper, Mystery Stories, Man to Man, Philosophy, Mass Media,

Learning Center (an option for illiterate or marginally literate students), What's Happening (a second option for the same students), Troubleshooter (and a third), Developmental English, Black Literature, Grammar, Careers, Journalism, Social Problems, Mastery Learning Project, Writing, American Literature or simply English. In addition to 30 separate courses in English, the school offers 16 options in social studies, 12 in math, 15 in business, 10 in vocational training, eight in science, eight in art, seven in music, and three in home economics. Physical education, driver education, and co-op education are also available.

In a second school, there is an equally broad array of courses. To satisfy the one year requirement for social studies there, one may take world history, economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, state history or World War II. These schools have students who attend an area career center to study advanced courses in welding, hairdressing, laboratory work, woods, metals, building trades, secretarial work, and data processing. Other students can, and some do, attend the local community college for advanced work in math, science or arts, and both this school and the first have classes wherein students can earn advanced college credit.

Unlike the first school where the day is only five periods long and ends at 12:45 p.m., the second school

has a day of eight periods. There it is possible to graduate in three years, while it takes at least three and one-half years to graduate from the first school. The second school's more flexible day enables third and fourth year students to leave the building as early as the end of the fifth hour (11:15 a.m.) to go to paying jobs for which some of them are receiving high school credit through the co-op program. Two-thirds of the seniors and half of the juniors avail themselves of that option. In addition, a student may, after his 17th birthday, take a full daytime job and attend evening school. And each of these schools has a full compliment of courses to fit the needs of various categories of special students. In both schools one must accumulate from 17 to 21 credits to graduate, but the required courses are minimal. By Board of Education policy, students must take government, one year of general math, one of science, three of English, one of physical education, and one of social studies. With the minimal requirements and the optimum number of electives, the curriculum of these comprehensive secondary schools may best be described as open, fluid, and diverse.

The sources of the diversity referred to are both internal and external. As everyone knows, education is generally regarded as a function of individual states, but the states do not set the curriculum as much as they "suggest" certain elements to be included. For instance

in Michigan, the state requires that each school "offer" social studies, consumer, special, bilingual, career and driver education, sex hygiene, health and physical education, the effects of alcohol and drugs, and basic language, but it requires only that each student take a semester of government. The North Central Association, which accredits most of the states' schools, "suggests" that a school offer a basic program of language arts, science, math, social studies, foreign language, fine and practical arts and physical education, but then it leaves "school to plan its own curriculum to serve its own students." In effect, with the state having no articulate view of what constitutes an education, the accrediting agencies dependent on the voluntary compliance of their members for support, and the local schools accountable to their various publics, the curriculum of secondary schools is somewhat "up for grabs" and when that occurs, people tend to grab. There are innumerable instances of various publics forcing particular elements onto the schools.

One of the most interesting of these in recent years is the special education movement. Here in Michigan, the State Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to an equal education but for years, the Parents of Mentally Retarded Children and the Michigan Association of Retarded Citizens, two very powerful lobbying groups were dissatisfied with the services special children were receiving.

Alligning themselves with interest groups within the State Department of Education, and encouraged by a court decision from California which required better education for special children, they initiated a suit against the state citing them for unequal educational practices. The threat of legal action and the accompanying lobbying forced the legislature to pass Public Law 198 which required local schools to provide "all handicapped persons who have not graduated from high school, ages 0-25, ...special education programs and services designed to develop their maximum potential," (p. 226). The effects of this have been enormous. In many states, up to 15% of the students, have been designated as having special needs and the schools have to provide those students with special teachers, special treatment from teachers and administrators, special skill training and additional services for counseling, therapy, and placement. Also, teachers are regularly admonished to provide these students with differential treatment in regular classrooms into which they have been mainstreamed and teachers have also been asked to change their teaching styles to accommodate these students. An additional effect of other groups of parents, such as the parents of gifted children, have been encouraged to exert similar pressures on schools.

Whether the move was wise or unwise, it is not for discussion here, rather it is to point out the people who teach in schools, e.g., boards of education, teachers and administrators, having no clearly articulated view of their role in education or of education in general, have no effective counter to organized groups which claim, quite legitimately, that all they want is for schools to better serve the needs of some particular students.

After all, within the schools prevails the same attitude that the "needs" of the students should be served, and having no articulate view of what those "needs" might be, school people are in a weak position relative to the group that has a clear idea. Special education may be a heightened example but schools are always pressured by one or another group wanting resources allocated to the basics, music, athletics, bilingual education, affirmative action or whatever, and such a group has the opportunity to attack the school establishment at a number of points. They may

petition a local board, become involved in board elections, they may, as did the special ed groups, use the courts and a state legislature or a local parents organization. The fact is that the diversity which is apparent in secondary school curricula can in part be accounted for by the vulnerability of the school curriculum to particular outside pressure groups, a vulnerability which is in part responsible for the great diversity within schools but also the great diversity across schools. Since the efforts of the groups are locally initiated and directed, a particular school may have elements within it which are quite unlike those in neighboring schools.

There is a second force, external to the schools, but internal to the educational establishment, which has a similar effect in that its members are strong advocates for an open and fluid curriculum. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 channeled federal funds for schools through state departments of education. These agencies were allocated funds for administering the ESEA grants and programs, and with those funds were able to vastly expand their size and subsequently their scope. The effect was to create large numbers of educators who although they do not have contact with students, still feel themselves responsible for educating students. These people have become advocates for a number of ideas and programs such as accountability and testing, bilingual

and special education, career education and career centers, vocational and co-op education, the students rights movements and other programs, the addition of which further fragments and diversifies the curriculum of the schools. As one might expect, it is generally within these peoples' interests to advocate for an open curriculum because they are then more able to access those schools with particular programs. Our explanation of the diversity of the curriculum within secondary schools suggests that there are two general external forces operating on schools to keep them diverse and fluid. The first of these is specific advocacy groups, which are outside the schools. The second is that large and growing group of educators who are distant from students but still within the establishment and who can more easily access and effect schools wherein the curriculum is kept open, fluid and diverse.

The second source of diversity within the school curriculum has to do with the school's internal structure. For their survival, schools are dependent on continuous attendance from large numbers of students whom it is assumed have very different educational needs. This term "needs" is left purposely vague and undefined, but it is further assumed that each student has some idea of his own set and the school is constructed to allow him or her to select experiences appropriate to those needs. To the degree that there is any educational philosophy behind such a structure, it consists of some precepts from progressive education, such

as "education should be geared to life, teacher should try to be empathetic with students, learning should be based on experience and experiences should be broad." Of course the basic premise about the obligation of the school to serve diverse students with diverse programs is never seriously questioned. Hence, all one has to do to justify an extension of the curriculum is argue from that premise. And since the definition of "needs" is left undefined, it follows, theoretically at least, that the number of options and electives offered in school is potentially unlimited.

Then too, there is a great deal of wariness within schools about imposing curriculum on students. If done overtly, that would constitute a form of tracking and tracking incurred a bad name because in the past it resulted in overt discrimination against black students, poor students and particularly, black poor students. Avoiding formal tracking, although maintaining the kind of tracking inherent in offering courses that demand prerequisites, works out well for additional reasons. It means that no one in a position of authority has to decide whether Algebra II is more important than woods, or welding more important than French III. If decisions like that had to be made within schools, they might conflict with the certification offices of the state, the teacher unions and the contract and salary agreement, none of which discriminate among teachers. A teacher is a teacher, and a subject is a subject.

With the structure such that the administrators spend their time on attendance, discipline and public relations, the day-to-day responsibility for curriculum falls to the teachers, who have two sets of demands on them. The first is that they instruct and learn to "get along with the students," the second is that they not burden the already busy administrators with additional disciplinary problems. What it amounts to is that the teachers left alone in the classes and charged with maintaining order, instructing and getting along with the students are themselves the creators of the vast number of electives offered. It is the teachers who create the diverse courses to fulfill what they perceive to be the demands of the students, and in order to fulfill themselves as teachers and individuals. After all, it is the affective relations with students that provide teachers with greatest rewards. It is only natural that they should center those relations on common, even personal interests, that they can share with students. The open elective course system encourages them to range about in search of finding those common interests and then attract students to their classes on that basis.

When investigating the curriculum of some particular schools, we found a large number of interesting courses and when asking about their genesis, we found that each was created by individual teachers to respond to what each perceived as the needs of some students. The requirement is for a credit of English. The teacher who liked and studied

philosophy created a philosophy class, one who liked music created a music as expression class, one who liked the classics, a classics class, one who himself wrote poetry, a creative writing class, one who himself had a background in forensics, a speech class. A business math teacher enjoyed computers; he started a computer club, sent the club members out to sell candy, flowers and tee-shirts and with the proceeds bought some small computers. He then worked a curriculum elective through the administrators, continued to sell candy, flowers, etc., bought more computers and now has four classes of computers, and one business math. This entruprenenial approach by teachers is the rule, not the exception in the schools we studied. One was hired in to teach chemistry which he admitted, he did not like, but he did like his physical science class for students who were not interested in education beyond high school. He created additional electives in physical science, recruited more students and turned his assignment into four classes of physical science, one of chemistry. It can be argued that the schools cited were quite loosely run and therefore, atypical, but the structure described is the structure of most secondary American schools, and the kind of freedom that teachers have to create their own classes is what one would expect to find in such a structure. With little supervision from administrators who are busy with matters of discipline, attendance and supervision and public relations charged with "getting along" which means having to appeal to students who are relatively free to <u>not</u>

elect their classes, and left alone with their students for almost all of the day, teachers work to find ways to take their personal interests and create appealing classes around them. And, of course, no matter what the approach one takes, whether to appeal to the gifted, the non-readers, tougher students, disadvantaged, or those interested in poetry, music, outdoor education, computers, co-op or whatever, each teacher is relatively free to find a group of students for whom his approach and subject seem effective and use their interest as evidence assent that what he is doing is "good for kids." Indeed, it may be, but rarely is one asked to defend or prove the assertion. The stating of it and the demonstration of a sufficient number of students enrolled in the activity on class is sufficient.

It may be that the case for diversity is being over-stated. After all, there is a schedule, timed periods, 17 to 30 students to a class, five or six classes a day. All of that is given but the diversity we are talking about resides within that. Across schools, one may expect great diversity, but it may be that with some strong community support and a critical mass of homogenous students, e.g., the college bound, a single school may offer a limited and unified program. The key resides with the makeup of the critical mass of students in the school. The diversity and disparity will be greater in schools with a more diverse populace, less with a more homogenous populace. So, while the openness and fluidity are less within some schools,

across schools, they are still great. In sum, the argument is that in order to understand secondary public schools, one has to appreciate the fundamental elements which constitute the structure and the curriculum that follows that structure. While sometimes characterized as monolythic or sterile or sometimes accused of attempting to impress a uniform education on everyone, those characterizations and criticisms have been most often uttered by those whose main desire is to further fragment and diversify the curriculum. A more accurate rendition is that school people themselves long ago adopted an educational perspective that sees as reasonable and good, a fragmented, diverse, open and fluid curriculum which offers as many options to students and as much freedom to teachers as time and space permit and allows each student, in the name of satisfying his educational needs, to put together an appropriate set of experiences. The constraints, beliefs, behaviors, structure and curriculum all combine to support that perspective.

There are some advantages and disadvantages to this free market system of education. One possibly negative side is the little emphasis that such a system places on the building and maintaining of a community within the schools and the absence of normitiveness that goes with a lack of community. Given the dominant perspective, one would expect to find little community; after all, a strong normitive structure is simple inconsistent with the extant system. The choice was made long ago and embedded into the school

that the satisfying of individual needs should take precedence over the preservation of a community. This is what sharply differentiates the public schools from the private schools. Private schools, whether religious, academic/elitist or special purpose are characterized by a dual emphasis, the student and the organization. One knows when he or she enters that one is expected to become a certain kind of person in that place, there is a normitive society toward which one is expected to strive and a great deal of organizational energy is devoted to preserving that central ethic.

But the public school's committed to the education of all, even those who give repeated evidence of not being interested in the acquisition of positive knowledge, of necessity, have adopted a perspective which favors the needs of the individual over the needs of the communal organization. While the public system has obvious advantages of being able to continue the universalization of secondary education, that sharp difference disadvantages the public schools when juxtaposed to private schools, because the latter are more able to articulate a coherent relation between their goals and activities. And it may be as some have suggested that the community itself, serving a pedogogical end of inspiring and motivating students to do better and work harder, is something that public schools were too quick to discard. It may even be that while the public system offers broad advantages to those students sufficiently sophisticated or guided to take

the best available such a system might further disadvantage those who lack both sophistication and/or strong guidance. That would be a paradox; after all, the strongest argument for diversity and fluidity has been that they help extend education to the less advantaged. It would be unfortunate, as well as paradoxical, if the sum of it all further disadvantaged those people whom it was the intent to assist.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

The logic of the argument is that schools are founded on some basic beliefs, e.g. that the acquisition of positive knowledge is or can be made interesting and appealing to everyone, that they should be comprehensive and that since they are publically funded, they should be geared to the diverse needs of their diverse publics. The beliefs support the accompanying behaviors and the beliefs and behaviors combine into the structure. The logic of the curriculum follows the logic of the structure and the result is large schools with diverse and fragmented offerings. With such a system, what are schools like for students and what adjustments do students have to make to succeed there? The more fundamental question is, which students: those who enter secondary schools with some interest in learning, some sophistication of their own, or lacking that, some strong guidance from the parents which will help them select out an appropriate education and provide them with some motivation to see it through? For students who know they are going to college, who knows, they need the more competitive courses.

verbal and quantitive skills and will enroll in five years of English, four of math, three or four of science, three or four of languages and social studies, school can be an interesting and rewarding place with a clear articulation between present activities and future goals. Or for students who may not wish to go to college but who have some reasonably clear career work plans and who will take the advanced vocational classes, who will take advantage of what area or district career centers are available, a cooperative program that so many schools develop with area employers, for them also, school can be an interesting and coherent experience. For them perhaps even more than the former group, the openness, fluidity and diversity of the system and the willingness of secondary educators to consider alternatives is a clear advantage. While the latter group may be less than enthused by some of the academic requirements, the elective system has provided options for them, and if they wish they can, in most districts, take their third and four year on a reduced academic load while making up credits through working. Or if they wish, in most districts, there are adult and evening classes they may take while they work during the day. In the past decade, the emphasis on vocational and career education and the clearly articulated desire on the part of graduates for more work-oriented experiences, has been taken seriously by school people and more and more opportunities have been made available. Even for students who have neither the desire nor ambition to attend college, nor any clearly articulated work plans, secondary schools offer innumerable opportunities for sports,

friendships, activities, or for an affective relations with sympathetic and understanding teachers. Any of those if entered into with a willing and open spirit can be sufficiently rewarding to offset some of the inevitable tedium that accompanies life in an institution.

But on the other hand, there are those for whom the acquisition of positive knowledge is not interesting and who refuse to enter into any of the rewarding relationships within the school, who after nine or ten years of school still read and write poorly, if at all, and for whom simple arithmetic remains a mystery, who continually end up in the lowest classes with others of their type and where their ennui and defiance of the system discourages the most sympathetic teachers, for them school may indeed be a deadening experience, and the sooner they can find them way out the better.

What school is like is dependent on the way one enters or refuses to enter, takes part or refuses to take part, engages or refuses to engage the institution. One faces the institution as an individual. The education is available but it is up to each to wrest it out, find those good classes, appealing teachers, rewarding relationships with teachers and peers. One may make something of the available opportunities, but one is free to drift in and out of the lowest classes falling to the bottom of whatever he or she enters, interacting primarily with the administrators in charge of dicipline and attendance. Such a system can do a great deal for those for whom the

acquisition of positive knowledge is interesting and appealing; it can do little for those for whom it is neither.

But, "which students" is only part of the answer to the question of what school is like for students. One may ask then "which school?" There is a great deal of attention currently being paid to describing what might be a "good school." According to the analysis presented here, a good school is one that is attended by a critical mass of good students, students for whom the acquisition of positive knowledge is interesting and appealing. A "good school" per se, does not exist apart from that mass who are sufficiently interested to motivate teachers, request and then enter into the spirit of the classes, and keep the school interesting and alive. It has been argued here that what one obtains from school is dependent on the student, but it has to be easier to obtain some quality in schools where there is a sufficient number of interested and agressive students who keep up the level of discourse, do the work assigned encouraging the teachers to prepare carefully, who have parents asking about grades and teachers grading carefully and handing work back on time

While the major assertion is that there is an excellent education to be had by the agressive and/or sophisticated child, it is also true that it is easier to find in the schools with a critical mass of such students. In schools where that mass is lacking, where there are a preponderance of remedial classes and where college-bound classes are not really college bound, where

there are not a sufficient number of students for an honors or advanced academics or vocational classes, where there are high dropout rates, and attendance and discipline problems, then it is more difficult, for the student to obtain a quality education. And the "good schools" are located in places where the students begin with some advantages, some moderate level of income, some parent(s) with an education or who cares about an education. There is considerable disparity among the public schools with those located in the middle to upper income areas much more likely to offer the fourth year of math, third and fourth years of language, fifth year of English composition and better vocational facilities and better opportunities for student employment. The schools located in the poorer areas are much less able to sustain those classes without a sufficient number of interested students.

And as everyone knows, the schools in the poorer areas have a high percentage of black and hispanic students who have double the dropout rate of their white counterparts, those schools offer fewer of the academic electives, have inferior vocational facilities, more and greater discipline and attendance problems, have to allocate more of their resources to those problems, and have students who read and write less well than in either other public schools, or private schools. For students in those schools, it will be more difficult to wrest out an education. The structure holds across schools, but because of the elements

of that structure, openness, publicness, fluidity and diversity, then the quality of that structure differs according to the clientele.

The public schools have been subjected to serious criticism of their structure. But the structure, according to this analysis, can be quite beneficial to those students to enter the institution with some moderate levels of ability and willingness. The students whom the system may be failing are those who enter with neither; and in schools with a large number of them together, where they litterally compound each others problems, and where the fact of a mass of them can dominate everything else including administrative behaviors and teacher approaches, then the criticisms may be justified. But the problems are not with the structure, per se, but rather the structure combined with that particular mass.

What may one reasonably expect to learn in the public schools? The case has been made? The structure is such that the individual student is the appropriate unit of analysis, not the school or the genre of schools. It is a free-market system wherein each is expected to and but for the exceptions mentioned above, encouraged to and allowed to, construct his education as he will. There is another possible level of analysis to this question. One might consider the type of values students learn when placed in a situation wherein certain values are embodied. One may learn for instance how to behave in a bureaucracy where rules, roles and regulations are important; one may learn how to behave relative to authority with whom one has no personal relations; one may learn responsibility for ones actions; about the uses of informal peer systems, the necessity of taking charge of ones' affairs, and creating a coherence across activities, about the necessity of putting up with some of the inevitable tedium of organizational life in order to garner the rewards All of those elements are important to a successful adult life and all are taught, at least implicitly, in secondary schools.

What is the dominant view of learning held by staff and how do they go about instructing students? This question necessitates a discussion of a second set of criticisms that have been leveled at the public schools. Within the structure is an instructional mode that divides instruction into 40 or 50 minute periods and assigns faculty members to dole them out to routinized and batched sets of students five or six

times a day. One can well understand the criticisms that such a system might generate, e.g. sterile, wooden, unimaginative, deadening, monotoneous, etc. But the critics do not have a sufficient appreciation of the problems associated with massing a large number of adolescents in the same place for several hours each day and keeping them dry, warm, accounted for and in reasonable order.- The situation necessitates the bureaucracy and the bureaucracy engenders additional constraints. It is easy to criticize or even ridicule the bureaucratic elements, e.g. hall passes, attendance and accounting procedures, process hearings, absence policies, PA systems, and endless forms for counting this or that, but within the system the students are kept dry, warm, accounted for and reasonably orderly.

The view of learning and teaching is dominated more by the bureaucratic necessity than by pedogical theory. The fact of 30 students' in the room for 45 minutes, five times a day dominates the teacher's consideration and severely limits the range of possible approaches. One is obligated to maintain order even among the potentially disorderly, to concentrate on developing a normitive society in which the students take responsibility for one another as well as for themselves, depending on verbal interaction and an abstracted version of reality. And the emphasis is on teacher activity, student passivity. All of that makes sense, given the bureaucratic necessity; but it is easy to see why it draws criticisms. But if is also to see why people who teach and administer public schools are so defensive and even hostile

to criticisms from those who fail to appreciate the logistics of the situation.

How do the limits and the possibilities of the experience change from the time one enters high school at 13 or 14 to the time one leaves at 17 or 18? The structure is such that the system is progressively more diverse the closer one comes to graduation. By the time one is a senior, he may be in school only a few hours a day, making up other hours in co-op or work-study or career center programs. Similarly, he or she may be still taking five academic classes with one study hall. It all depends on the choices the student made along the way. The breadth of activities is in keeping with the beliefs of school people that as the students grow, they should be given more options, and the realities that by the time they have reached 16-19 years of age, unless they are provided with options in school they may have decided to drop out and find options in other places. Again, the activities follow the structure.

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